RECENTLY RECORDED ABORIGINAL PAINTING SITES IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNT LOFTY RANGES

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Abstract

Between 2000–2015, systematic pedestrian surveys were undertaken in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges. The research aims were to identify unrecorded sites to facilitate the Mannum Aboriginal Community Association Inc.’s capacity to manage their cultural heritage. During the surveys 19 previously unrecorded rock art sites were located, 11 of which are described here. The spacial associations with other rock art locations were examined and reoccurring motifs recorded and analysed. The number of known rock art sites in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges now numbers 76 and their distribution extends from near Eden Valley and Mount Pleasant in the north, southwards to Tungkillo, Rockleigh and Tepko. The motifs recorded are primarily anthropomorphic or reptilian in nature, although some geometric designs are present—these motifs are similar to others previously recorded in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges.
Introduction

In 1902 two Aboriginal rock art sites were documented on the South Para River in the Barossa Ranges of South Australia (SA) as relics of ‘the Adelaide tribe of natives’ (Adelaide Chronicle 1902:34). In the same year a photographic reporter, numerous academics and local residents visited and inspected the paintings—subsequent discussions also took place regarding the possibility of ‘removing the shelters to a site at the South Australian Museum’ (Stirling 1902:208–211).

In 1914 Captain S. White of the Royal Society of South Australia (RSSA) and Mr F.R. Zietz revisited the rockshelters. They photographed and excavated both sites and reported their finds to the RSSA. At an ensuing meeting a motion was passed by the RSSA ‘that the Council be requested to consider what steps could be taken to protect these interesting relics’ (as cited in Coles and Hunter 2010:118). Despite the motion nothing was done with respect to the sites for two decades when in 1926 Norman Tindale, a newly appointed entomological assistant to the South Australian Museum, revisited the sites and located three more paintings further downstream (Tindale and Sheard 1927).

The original two sites, as described by Stirling (1902:208), were eventually protected by caging them with steel in the early 1980s after campers used the motifs for target practice with their air rifles (Phil Fitzpatrick pers. comm.). Further survey work was not carried out until the mid-1980s. In the late 1980s, Tindale’s sites were relocated by staff from the SA Aboriginal Heritage Branch when SA legislation was introduced to protect sites, at which time they were listed on the State Heritage Register. Following the heritage listings a resident and amateur recorder, Luke Freeman (a member Anthropological Society of South Australia), located another painting site downstream, bringing the total number of recorded sites on the South Para River to six. In 1999 in the nearby Cockatoo Valley another painting site was found by Freeman (see Coles and Hunter 2010:119, 132, 133).
Further to the south, at the Kaiser Stuhl Conservation Park, a painting and an engraving were located in 1990 and 1991. These varied in style from the South Para River sites as they were linear, geometric and maze-like, with one in a granite shelter (Coles 1992:42–44) and the other, an engraving, on the wall of a granite tor (Coles and Hunter 2010:119, 135).

From 1926–2000 researchers described (and excavated near) newly found painting and engraving sites: near Eden Valley along the River Marne and Saunders Creek (Coles 1997; Gara and Turner 1986; Hossfeld 1926; Preiss 1961; Teusner 1963); Mount Pleasant (Gunn 1981; Mountford 1957; Ross and Ellis 1974); Tungkillo (Gunn 1981; Mountford 1960; Preiss 1964; Ross and Ellis 1974); Mount Barker Creek (Coles and Hunter 2010; Ross and Ellis 1974); and Kanmantoo and the Angas River regions (Coles 1992; Gunn 1981; Mountford 1960; Ross and Ellis 1974).

From 1992–2000 systematic survey work was carried out in the Eden Valley, Mount Pleasant, Tungkillo and Rockleigh areas near previously recorded rock art sites (Coles 1988, 1992, 1993, 1997, 2000). These surveys resulted in new finds of rock art (Figure 1).

Methods

The study involved plotting GPS coordinates (UTM WGS 84) (using a Garmin GPS 60) of recorded sites on 1:50,000 cadastral maps. Surveys were concentrated around previously recorded rock art sites and prominent rock outcrops. Property owner’s local knowledge was also sourced. The area surveyed on foot approximated 100 square km. Newly recorded sites between 2000 and 2015 were named according to their nearest location, water course or reference to another previously recorded rock art site. Details of each site were recorded on a modified form adapted from the State Aboriginal Heritage Branches site card for painting sites.
**Figure 1** Map of the southern Mount Lofty Ranges and previously recorded Aboriginal rock art sites up until 2000 (diamonds). Newly recorded rock art sites up until 2015 (circles). Map adapted from SA Department of Lands. Dashed black line showing the Peramangk southern ‘tribal’ boundary (after Tindale 1974).
For each site the numbers of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometric motifs were recorded photographically and sketches of faint motifs were made. All figure lengths and widths were taken. The height of figures from the floor and distance inwards from the dripline of the shelter and their spatial separation were measured. Wide figures had measurements taken of their maximum and minimum thorax width. The length of legs and arms were also measured. Neck lengths to the head base were taken and head heights and/or diameters measured. The extended tail or genitalia lengths and widths were measured when present. Geometric figures had measurements taken for length, width and or diameter. Pigments used were classified as red, white or black.

Figures were considered to be grouped if two or more were separated either horizontally or vertically by 5–10 cm and displayed on discrete areas of the rock art surface. Groups of motifs that had merged due to pigment run were considered as a single motif. All individual painted or drawn images that were clearly defined and separated by > 10 cm were considered to be a single figure. Some that were connected or superimposed over others were noted as separate figures. The characteristics of figures were adapted from Layton (1981:184) as:

The range of subjects it depicts, by the regular shapes to which elements of these subjects are reduced, and by the manner that components of the ART work are organised into a COMPOSITION [emphasis in original].

The mode of pigment application or motif production was noted e.g., painted, drawn or engraved. Faint digital colour images were enhanced by altering the brightness, contrast, colour balance and saturation in Photoshop.

In this study, figures with long necks and long tails were considered to be reptiles, and figures with rounded heads and short tails as human or anthropomorphic figures. McDonald (2012:217) has suggested that there is some ambiguity in defining anthropomorphic figures as male or ‘lizard men’ ‘where the penis of the anthropomorph is longer than the legs...however...for male human depictions...the penis must be shorter than the legs’. There is some confusion here with reptiles (lizards/goannas): ‘Lizard men usually, have feet and knees in anatomically correct positions—contra lizards where the back
legs bend upwards or outwards at the knees’ (McDonald 2012:217). In this study anthropomorphic figures depicted with tails longer than the back legs and elongated necks were considered as lizards/goannas and those with shorter necks and rounded heads as male humans (following Layton 1992:178–179).

Distance to the nearest permanent fresh water from each site was also recorded. The permanency of water courses was noted as being a minimum distance of approximately 10 m from water courses or soaks (Ross and Ellis 1974) and confirmed by The Geological Survey of South Australia Mineral Resources Division, as ‘likely to be minor and local’, and where ‘the river systems 200 to 3000 years ago would not have been any different from today’ (Peter Waring pers. comm. 2013).

Results: Newly Recorded Rock Art Sites in the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges

Knob Shelter
In the granite outcrop region of Tungkillo and Palmer is a small shelter with painted figures, 4 km southeast of the Rosebank Shelter and 100 m from a spring-fed dam. Named Knob Shelter due to its shape, it is 2.2 m high, 2.5 m wide and 1.6 m deep (Figure 2). On the vertical wall 0.9 m above the floor there is a painted red anthropomorphic or ‘reptilian like’ figure; poor preservation meant the motifs were only clearly defined using Photoshop (see Figures 3 and 4). The motif measures 26 cm in length and 9 cm at mid-width and consists of three figures joined to a central figure’s lower legs. These connected figures fan upwards with pairs of arms raised each at angles of 35° left and 25° right. There is a separate reclining red figure 15 cm to the left and another 15 cm below the connected figure.
Fifteen cm to the right of the main motif is a drawn white figure resembling a woman with large pendulous breasts and drawn in circular nipples—this is likely recent graffiti (Coles 2000:370–377). Several rock outcrops in the vicinity also have graffiti initials drawn on them. The motifs are high enough in the shelter not to be damaged by animals rubbing against them. Mud nests elsewhere in the shelter are not impacting the art, but could in the future.

Figure 2 Knob Shelter near Palmer, view looking south.
Figure 3 Daylight flash image of red ochre motifs painted on the Knob Shelter wall beneath mud bird nest. Compass in the bird mud nest is 5 cm wide.

Figure 4 Photoshopped image of red ochre motifs painted in the Knob Shelter. Compass in the bird mud nest is 5 cm wide.
**Tungkillo 2**

In 1974 Ross and Ellis (1974:63) described an indistinct set of elliptical red markings in a shelter near Tungkillo. Shelters in this area typically consist of metasiltstones and metagreywackes and have an occupancy size for several people. Re-examination of the site revealed that two vertical and elliptical painted red motifs were present, one of which was paint outlined in white.

In 1998 a second shelter was recorded, approximately 179 m east of Ross and Ellis’ 1974 site and approximately 100 m from Harrison Creek, described as Tungkillo 2 Shelter (Figure 5). It measures 1.1 m high, 4.7 m wide and 1.7 m deep. It contains a painted red anthropomorphic figure angled at approximately 45°, and measures 17 cm long by 2 cm wide, with arms extended upwards. The right arm is slightly bent and may possibly represent a handheld boomerang. Below and to the left are a number of indistinct motifs; manipulation with Photoshop did not significantly enhance these motifs (see Figures 6 and 7).

![Figure 5](image.png)

**Figure 5** Tungkillo 2 Shelter, view looking south.
Figure 6 Motifs in Tungkillo 2 Shelter.

Figure 7 Photoshopped image of motifs in Tungkillo 2 Shelter.
West Baker Creek
Three sites are present near Baker Creek (Coles 2000:197–211). The largest, West Baker Creek Shelter, is in a metasiltstone and metagreywacke outcrop, measures approximately 10 m high, 15 m wide and 3.1 m deep, and overlooks a rock pool (Figure 8). Two sets of painted red figures occur on the north and northwest sides of the shelter. One on the northern face is an unusual anthropomorphic motif with a painted vertical connecting arc, and ‘reptile like’ curving line with a wide expanded tail. There are 14 short parallel motifs painted red and associated with the anthropomorphic figure. On the northwest wall is a possible bird footprint and a red painted anthropomorphic figure with a ‘herring bone’ form. Further to the right (50 cm) there are more anthropomorphic ‘reptile’ figures, one showing a connected ‘trident’ figure with a ‘club-like’ tail and similar to those described at Knob Shelter. Further to the right (1 m), is a wavy vertical line 2 m long and 6 cm wide (Figure 8). These figures are similar to those recorded at Harrison Creek Shelter (Ross and Ellis 1974:37–41) but lack painted white overlays. The figures in the West Baker Creek Shelter are slightly damaged by avian faecal material and water erosion, probably associated with previous flooding.

Figure 8 Illustration of red ochre motifs in West Baker Creek Shelter.
East Baker Creek
Approximately 0.5 km southeast of West Baker Creek Shelter another large metasiltstone and metagreywacke boulder contains paintings. Named East Baker Creek Shelter, it is approximately 20 m from the creek and measures 8 m wide, 0.7 m high and 0.5 m deep (Figure 9). On the vertical shelter wall is a red ochre complex connected figure resembling the ‘trident’ connected figure at West Baker Creek Shelter and Knob Shelter. To the left is a 15 cm long curved, red painted figure which may represent a partially eroded anthropomorphic motif (Figure 10) (Coles 2000:205–207). This shelter has been damaged by rock fracturing, water erosion and animal rubbings.

Figure 9 Illustration of East Baker Creek Shelter showing the boulder fracture.
North Baker Creek Shelter

Northeast and approximately 350 m from West Baker Creek Shelter is a large metasiltstone boulder that forms a shelter. The boulder has a vertical split and the shelter slopes downwards to the floor at an angle of 30°. It is 2 m high, 19 m wide and 6.7 m deep. Some faint red motifs were visible on the northern face, however, they were too eroded to identify and were not recorded. On the shelter floor was recent evidence of sheep faeces, with wool grease on the wall. Several exposed artefacts were found on the floor including a bone point which is 15 cm long and a small quartz core (Coles 2000:208–211).

Figure 10 Illustration of painted figures in East Baker Creek Shelter. Courtesy of Marko Podoreski.
North Talbot Creek

Two more art sites occur on Talbot Creek, both formed of metasiltstones and metagreywackes. The first, named North Talbots Creek Shelter by Ross and Ellis (1974:45), was described as containing a ‘red...elongated shape...outlined in black...on a painted boulder on the floor and were...not clear enough to photograph or draw.’ A nearby stone, argued to form part of a stone arrangement, was also mentioned:

A presumed stone arrangement of Aboriginal origin formerly existed nearby on the slope south of a ridge overlooking this site. The arrangement which focuses upon an unusual boulder of almost spherical form was earlier disturbed when the boulder was removed by the landowners. (Ross and Ellis 1974:45)

The shelter is on the banks of Talbot Creek and comprises a large flat capping stone of laminated metagreywacke resting on supporting rocks, forming a shelter 1.2 m high, 5 m wide and 1.7 m deep. The red painting on the north facing side of the rock complex may represent a reclining, anthropomorphic or ‘reptilian motif’, partially outlined in black. Those on the south facing side are three red associated animated figures. Both panels are affected by avian faecal material (Figure 11) (Coles 2000:188–190).
Figure 11 Illustration of North Talbot Creek Shelter anthropomorphic figures outlined in black.

**East Talbot Creek**

A second art site 400 m northeast of North Talbot Creek is called East Talbot Creek Shelter. It is part of a large, 3 m high metagreywacke outcrop, 3.7 m wide and 2.7 m deep. The paintings are on a vertical rock face that overlooks a large rock pool (Coles 2000:215–218). Two main figures were recognisable. First, a painted red anthropomorphic or ‘lizard-like’ figure measuring 5 cm wide and 35 cm high, partially outlined in black on the right side and similar to the larger, red and black outlined motif at North Talbot Creek Shelter. On the same shelter wall, 50 cm below and slightly to the right, is a figurative curved black line drawn on a separate rock face (Figure 12) (Coles 2000:215). The art is periodically coated with dust deposits.
Figure 12 Illustration of the anthropomorphic painted figure (a) with black outlining on right and (b) drawn black meandering line.
**Pyms Road Shelter**

Pyms Road Shelter is in a large rock outcrop and is 5 m high, 8 m wide and 3.7 m deep. It is formed from metasiltstones and metagreywackes (Figure 13). The red painted art panel comprises five faint goanna motifs. They are 40–53 cm in length and 4 cm wide in the mid-thorax region and have extended necks which are 10 cm long and tails that are 5–10 cm long. Two of the central figures have legs almost touching (Figures 14 and 15). A number of eroded hollows and ‘cupule like’ depressions cover the floor boulders. Charcoal occurs on the floor and quartz artefacts were located within the shelter and 100 m east in the sandy cultivated paddock. A permanent spring (now a small dam) is positioned 250 m northeast of the site (Coles 2000:369–372). Rock exfoliation has damaged some of the art.

![Figure 13 Pyms Road Shelter, view looking south.](image)
Figure 14 Goanna-like figures in Pyms Road Shelter.

Figure 15 Photoshopped image of red ochre goanna-like figures in Pyms Road Shelter.
**Tepko Shelters 1 and 2**

Originally reported in 1999 (Vlad Potezny pers. comm. 2000), Tepko Shelters 1 and 2 are 3.5 km southeast of Pyms Road Shelter. Both are formed of metasiltstones and metagreywackes, and are 35 m apart. They are approximately 0.75 km south of a tributary of Loxton Creek and 1 km northeast of Salt Creek.

Shelter 1 is 2.38 m high, 4.4 m wide and 2.8 m deep (Figure 16). A single indistinct red motif was present on the shelter wall, and nearby a set of parallel lines were scratched on a lower ledge. One partially incomplete engraved figure was located above the parallel lines (Figure 17). A metagreywacke block with a semicircular worn groove through half its thickness was found near the entrance of Tepko 1 Shelter. It was hypothesised that this artefact may have been used as a sanding block for a cylindrical wooden implement.

Shelter 2 is 1.65 m high, 1.6 m wide and 0.9 m deep with indistinct faint motifs near the entrance. The motifs consist of engraved lines and were too eroded to record accurately (Coles 2000:279–284). Both shelters have extensive water damage to the rock surfaces.

**Figure 16** Tepko 1 Shelter, view looking south.
Figure 17 Illustration of engraved geometric motifs and faint ochre figure in Tepko 1 Shelter.
**Flag Gully Shelter**

Flag Gully Shelter is 2 km southeast of Tepko 1 and 2 Shelters, on the banks of the flood-prone Flag Gully Creek and was first reported by Marko Podoreski (pers. comm. 1998). It is formed in metasiltstones and metagreywackes at the base of a steep cliff face. Flag Gully Shelter is approximately 7 m high, 30 m in length and 2 m deep, and contains two sets of rock art (Figure 18). The first comprises 13 red vertical and anthropomorphic or ‘lizard like’ figures. They are painted on two horizontal and parallel rock ledges near the floor and are faded and merged due to pigment movement. Eight of these figures have short tails and raised arms, and four of the aforementioned eight have small rounded heads (Figure 19). On average they measure 30 cm long and 6.3 cm wide. The large figures differ from those found in nearby rockshelters, the latter of which on average measure 23 cm long and 2.5 cm wide. A second set of red ochre painted motifs occur on a boulder 10 m northwest of the rock ledge figures; these are also anthropomorphic or ‘reptile like’ with a central figure having a long, connected and vertical line at the mid-thorax region (Figure 20).

![Illustration of Flag Gully Shelter showing positions of rock art at the base of cliff.](image-url)

**Figure 18** Illustration of Flag Gully Shelter showing positions of rock art at the base of cliff.
Figure 19 Flag Gully Shelter, illustration of painted red ochre figures on rock ledge.

Figure 20 Flag Gully Shelter, illustration of painted figures on floor boulder.
Discussion

In the study area of the Mount Lofty Ranges, rock art was first recorded by researchers such as Mountford (1960, 1967), at a time when Aboriginal rock art in Australia was poorly understood. There were errors with the number of figures identified and their mode of production (i.e., whether they were painted or drawn). Many of their positions on shelter walls were inaccurately displayed in early publications. In 1974 some of these shortcomings were corrected by Ross and Ellis (1974:25–30). Prior to this time the recording of ‘Aboriginal interpretations of rock art were almost non-existent’ (Gunn et al. 2011:2).

The numbers of panels at the shelters range from 1–3. Motif numbers range from 2–22 for each site, either on wall panels or floor boulders in the vicinity. The three modes of production were painting, drawing and engraving and the colours utilised included monochrome (red or white), bichrome (red and black) (Table 1). In these sites anthropomorphic figures were often described as ‘lizard-like’, but in recent studies a more nuanced interpretation of these figures has occurred. For example, the perception of ‘lizard-like’ motifs described by Layton (1992) and proposed by McCarthy (1967) as occurring over a large area ‘that extends from north Queensland through the central Queensland highlands, along the coast and Great Dividing Range, as far as central Victoria’ (Layton 1992:180). Throughout this area ‘the cave paintings form a distinctive group in subject and styles’ (McCarthy 1967:42).
Table 1 Summary of panels, motifs, production mode and colours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Panel Nos.</th>
<th>Motif Nos.</th>
<th>Motif types</th>
<th>Production mode</th>
<th>Pigment colours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knob Shelter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted, drawn</td>
<td>Red, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tungkillo 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Baker Creek</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Baker Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Baker Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Talbot Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red with black outlining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Talbot Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted, drawn</td>
<td>Red with black outlining, black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyms Road</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Goannas</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tepko 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic, figurative</td>
<td>Painted, engraved</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tepko 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Engraved</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flag Gully</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Painted</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vocabulary of geometric motifs may have ‘undergone change through time, as some motifs were dropped and others added’ and ‘[d]ifferent sites may provide ‘snap-shots’ of this process captured at different periods’ (Layton 1992:206). This was evident where motifs had been partially outlined in black (see Figure 12) or the use of white using painted, drawn or engraved lines in other rock art sites previously described (Coles 1992:52). At these sites the secondary engraved lines cut through previously painted figures exposed the underlying rock. This additional art indicates a later time period for the engravings or motif outlining since they overlay the red ochre figures. The addition to rock art and specific motifs suggests a continuing expression of ritual or canonical messages (Layton 1992:54–58; Ross and Davidson 2006:312).
The sites in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges study area have recognisable geometric figures identical to Layton’s ‘indeterminate lizard/humans and parallel lines...common in the southeast quarter of the continent’ (Layton 1992:210–211). Surveys in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges are continuing near Forest Range, Horsnell Conservation Park and Onkaparinga Recreational Park. There are current threats to the long term survival of these sites including property development, surface erosion and damage from other natural processes.

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References


